

## Transposals Between U.S. Place Names

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In *Word Ways* in November 1973 (“An Onomastic Study (Part 3)”), Dmitri Borgmann searched for names of U.S. cities, towns, or villages that were transposals of each other. The longest well-mixed pair he found consisted of 9-letter names: MASTERSON, Texas, and SEARSMONT, Maine.

It is worthwhile to revisit this topic in hopes of finding longer examples. We take as our source the database of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names, an agency responsible for standardizing place names as used by the U.S. federal government. Their data set includes incorporated towns, such as SEARSMONT, and unincorporated communities, such as MASTERSON. It is accessible at [www.usgs.gov/core-science-systems/ngp/board-on-geographic-names](http://www.usgs.gov/core-science-systems/ngp/board-on-geographic-names). For transposals, we will follow A. Ross Eckler and others in taking “well-mixed” to mean the names have no tetragrams in common; Borgmann appears to have applied a comparable threshold because he mentioned the 11-letter names ENGLISHTOWN, New Jersey, and SHINGLETOWN, California, but acknowledged they were not well-mixed enough.

If we begin at the maximum length found by Borgmann, we find dozens of 9-letter pairs, so we will limit ourselves to highlighting two pairs that are especially satisfying because each town is incorporated and has a one-word name:

BONDURANT, Iowa – DUNBARTON, New Hampshire

LIVERPOOL, Texas – ROOPVILLE, Georgia

There are more than 30 pairs of 10-letter names and more than 20 pairs of 11-letter names. Rather than listing them all, we present the 11-letter names that form the longest pair in which both towns have single-word names:

DARDANELLES, Oregon – LANDERSDALE, Indiana

We find only two 12-letter pairs:

INDIAN STREAM, Maine – SAINT MEINRAD, Indiana

COSSART CREEK, Delaware – STOCKER ACRES, Vermont

Finally, three pairs are tied for longest at 13 letters each:

ALPINE TERRACE, Ohio – RAINTREE PLACE, Mississippi

NORTH STRABANE, Pennsylvania – TENANTS HARBOR, Maine

POPLAR ESTATES, Tennessee – TRES PAPALOTES, Texas

Of the names shown above with 11 letters or more, all but two, INDIAN STREAM and NORTH STRABANE, are unincorporated.

As an extension of this topic, we can explore transposals where each element consists of a town name followed by its corresponding state name. Such pairs can be well-mixed only if the towns are in different states, so this is one of the rare instances where a short transposal is, by virtue of its frugality, arguably more interesting than a long one. Our results range from 8 to 15 letters.

8 letters:

ELO, IDAHO – DALE, OHIO

9 letters:

ALDEN, OHIO – LEON, IDAHO

10 letters:

DOREMA, OHIO – MOORE, IDAHO

ELDEAN, OHIO – LEONE, IDAHO

RHODES, IOWA – SEWARD, OHIO

11 letters:

RAINBOW, UTAH – RATHBUN, IOWA

12 letters:

ANN, MINNESOTA – ENNIS, MONTANA

BARRET, KANSAS – STAR, NEBRASKA

DOVER, MONTANA – MORTON, NEVADA

13 letters:

ALOYS, NEBRASKA – BOYLE, ARKANSAS

BEECH, ARKANSAS – CHASE, NEBRASKA

BENA, MINNESOTA – SIEBEN, MONTANA

ROME, MINNESOTA – ROSEMONT, MAINE

14 letters:

HEBRON, ARKANSAS – SHARON, NEBRASKA

15 letters:

IMBODEN, ARKANSAS – MADISON, NEBRASKA

We regretfully observe that ELO is flagged as a historical designation, but on the positive side we note that the longest pair consists of two incorporated towns.

Instead of appending state names, we can pursue another reasonable extension of this query by seeking transposals between U.S. place names of any type, not just municipalities. The database of the U.S. Board on Geographic Names includes a wide range of geographic features, from airports and arches to wells and woods.

Below we present the longest well-mixed transposal pairs thus found, from 17 letters on up. In a few cases, more than one location with a given name exists, so we provide the city and state or county and state for only one example. With one exception, the names contain nouns that make it self-evident what types of features they are.

17 letters:

EAST DIAMOND SPRING (Maricopa County, Arizona) and SAINT REGIS POND DAM (Lawrence County, Mississippi)

HURSTLE BRADEN MINE (Anderson County, Tennessee) and ISLAND NUMBER THREE (Chippewa County, Michigan)

18 letters:

BOULDER SPRING TRAIL (Lake County, Oregon) and DILLENBURG'S AIRPORT (Shawano, Wisconsin)

GREENUP LOCKS AND DAM (Greenup, Kentucky) and LAKES END CAMPGROUND (McKenzie Bridge, Oregon)

KELLER RANCH AIRPORT (Johnson City, Texas) and PARRILLA CREEK NORTH (Duval County, Texas)

19 letters:

NORTH PARK GOLF COURSE (Allison Park, Pennsylvania) and SOUTH PRONG CLEAR FORK (a stream in Fentress County, Tennessee)

20 letters:

GOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (Irving, Texas) and OLD SHONGALOO CEMETERY (Shongaloo, Louisiana)

Borgmann had also posed the challenge of finding the longest trio of transposals among U.S. town names, offering three trios of 8-letter names: ALDERSON-LEONARDS-ROSELAND, CAROLINE-COLERAIN-CORNELIA, and MONTROSE-ROSEMONT-SOMERTON, the last of these not being well-mixed by our present definition. We can improve on that result by presenting a quartet of 8-letter names, each of which is well-mixed relative to the others:

ASHERTON, Texas

HANSROTE, West Virginia

NORTH SEA, New York

OSHANTER, Pennsylvania

One might be surprised this is not a quintet. Although there are unincorporated communities called Sheraton Forest, Sheraton Oaks, Sheraton Park, and Sheraton Place, there does not appear to be a U.S. town called simply SHERATON. Of course, this would not be well-mixed relative to ASHERTON regardless.

The longest well-mixed trio we find consists of 9-letter names. Although having two of the names end in -TON is not ideal, they nonetheless satisfy our criterion that no two names should have any tetragram in common:

BERLAMONT, Michigan

LAMBERTON, Minnesota

MARBLETON, Wyoming

When the trio challenge is expanded to encompass U.S. place names of all types, the longest sets appear to be three trios of 12-letter names. We conclude our study by listing them:

CAMELOT HOUSE (a former building at Southern Virginia University in Buena Vista, Virginia)

COTEAU HOLMES (an unincorporated community in St. Martin Parish, Louisiana)

THOMAS COULEE (a valley in Phillips County, Montana)

EL DADO SPRING (a spring in McKinley County, New Mexico)

GOLDEN RAPIDS (rapids on the St. John River in Aroostook County, Maine)

GRISDALE POND (a pond in Grays Harbor County, Washington)

KING PROSPECT (a manganese mine in Bradley County, Tennessee)

POCKET SPRING (a spring in Cassia County, Idaho)

STEPPING ROCK (a pillar-shaped rock formation in McCreary County, Kentucky)